

# *Academic Literacy Enhancement along the Schooling Path-Students' Reading and Writing Practices in Portuguese Schools and Universities*

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## *Abstract*

Many students in Higher Education have difficulties with reading and writing for academic purposes as their new context implies specific cultural and social practices, new genres, and new epistemological positions. An analysis of the Portuguese reality places the question beyond the borders of Higher Education. Analysis reveals Portuguese university students face specific reading and writing difficulties requiring complex uses of language. After considering possible social, cultural and economic causes that may underlie such difficulties, this analysis locates the primary cause in the Portuguese educational system and the literacy practices Portuguese students are involved in throughout their whole schooling path. The contrast between the reading and writing tasks students are expected to perform in Higher Education and those they used to perform at lower school levels suggests that any effective approach to academic writing should cover the whole schooling process. As well, the approach should also take into account language uses students perform daily outside school which are often different and distant from those discourses valued within academia.

**Keywords:** academic literacy, reading, writing, knowledge construction

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## *Resumen*

Muchos estudiantes de educación superior tienen dificultades con la lectura y la escritura para propósitos académicos, en tanto que sus contextos implican prácticas sociales y culturales específicas, nuevos géneros y nuevas posiciones epistemológicas. Un análisis de la realidad portuguesa ubica la cuestión más allá de las fronteras de la educación superior. Este trabajo revela que los estudiantes portugueses universitarios enfrentan dificultades específicas, que atienden a usos complejos del lenguaje. Teniendo en cuenta posibles causas a nivel social, económico y cultural, este análisis localiza la causa primaria en el sistema educativo portugués y en las prácticas de alfabetización en las que participan los estudiantes a lo largo de su trayectoria escolar. El contraste entre las tareas de lectura y escritura que se espera que los estudiantes de educación superior realicen con las que se hacían a niveles inferiores, sugieren que cualquier acercamiento efectivo a la escritura académica debe abarcar todo el proceso académico. Así mismo, el acercamiento debe tener en cuenta los usos del lenguaje que los estudiantes utilizan fuera de la escuela, los cuales suelen ser diferentes y distantes de aquellos discursos valorados dentro de la Academia.

**Palabras clave:** alfabetización académica, lectura, escritura, construcción del conocimiento

## **Introduction**

The increasing global awareness of the importance of reading and writing in Higher Education has been accompanied by a recognition of the difficulties that many students have when they deal with reading and writing for academic purposes. These difficulties arise as they move into a context that implies specific cultural and social practices, new genres, new epistemological positions (Preto-Bay, 2004; Donahue, 2009; Delcambre & Lahanier-Reuter, 2010), new ways of understanding, interpreting and organizing knowledge (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 157). Too often, however, observers of students' struggles blame them for their inadequacies.

This deficit discourse does not take into account the complexity of Higher Education literacy practices (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 157) and tends to place the burden of failure on the student and his/her individual circumstances, seeking to solve such problems through remediation strategies (Henderson & Hirst, 2007). It does not consider that these difficulties might be related to other factors such as teaching practices or the fact that many students haven't

had many opportunities to be engaged in complex and stimulating language uses (McCabe & Newhouse, 2014; Dudley-Marling, 2015; Johnson, Avineri & Johnson, 2017).

Portuguese universities are not an exception to these problems and many of their students struggle when dealing with academic literacy issues. Documenting and analyzing students' difficulties and the educational experiences that underlie them can lead us to a more precise set of curricular recommendations to support students in the difficult work of becoming competent writers capable of addressing the intellectual challenges of Higher Education and beyond. The aim of this text is to analyze how Portuguese university students perform reading and writing tasks, identify their difficulties and discuss the causes of their problems by analyzing academic literacy practices throughout their whole schooling path.

### **Higher Education: a specific context of language use**

First, although it would be useful to identify the challenges students must address in learning to write successfully in Higher Education, at this level, as in any other academic setting, language is used in very particular ways. Functions performed by reading and writing in that context are not merely instrumental. Among other things, learning a certain content is a matter of language, translation of experience into knowledge (Gavelek, Raphael, Biondo & Wang, 2000). Knowledge construction processes are, to a broad extent, based on reading and writing activities, and the quality of learning is often measured by its written expression.

Therefore, taking part in an academic context requires the mastery of specific discursive forms, generally designated as academic discourse, *the code that teachers and students use to present, discuss, teach and evaluate their issues* (Vásquez, 2001, p. 11). This discourse is defined by Motta-Roth (2009) as “the linguistic expression and construction of concepts, values and practices shared by members of an institution characterized by technical language and researching, teaching, learning and publishing practices that are constituted in different genres and registers” (p. 320).

Reading and writing activities involve interaction between cognitive and social dimensions within particular contexts, leading to the construction of a negotiated meaning (Nystrand, 1986; Flower, 1994, 1996). Assuming that any language used is socially framed and conditioned by external factors, we may then consider that the nature of academic texts is largely determined

by the context where they are produced and used. Primarily, the specificity of academic genres stems from the nature and purposes of educational activities mediated by them: knowledge transmission, knowledge acquisition, knowledge elaboration and knowledge expression functions, developed in teaching and learning contexts, where some other traits, such as originality, research, reflection and knowledge formulation according to one's own perspective, are also valued.

Furthermore, that specificity is a consequence of the unique nature of each knowledge field. Different scientific areas may configure a certain text genre differently, so we cannot define what an appropriate text in a given discipline is without considering the nature of the social and intellectual activity which such text is part of (Bazerman, 1988). Similar appearing genres can thus imply different configurations of content, format and style (Motta-Roth, 2009, p. 321).

Among the specific characteristics of academic texts are referencing and citation styles and, more fundamentally, the way information and ideas from source texts are retrieved and used to make arguments. Reading and writing academic texts involves not only generic reading and writing skills, but also specific skills, the ability to adapt to the specific demands of the context and to follow the norms and conventions accepted by a scientific community, that has defined a specific form to refer to the aspects of the world under their observation and research (Creme & Lea, 2000). This implies “a shared knowledge of and experience with the cultural and social practices of the institutions” (Preto-Bay, 2004, p. 88).

### **Portuguese students' difficulties in the use of academic language**

For many Portuguese students, moving from Secondary to Higher Education means facing a complex and challenging context that implies new reading and writing practices for which they have not been prepared. This causes difficulties that often affect students' performance and their academic success. This situation has been documented by a series of research studies carried out in Portugal, following both quantitative or qualitative methodologies and covering different scientific domains.

Problems related to academic writing practices in Portuguese Higher Education institutions are recognized both by teachers and students. However, they have a different perception of these problems and their causes.

While teachers emphasize students' lack of writing skills, visible in the texts they write, students criticize teachers for not clearly defining the goals and the procedures of writing assignments and giving little feedback.

In a study involving a sample of 225 teachers from different scientific domains (Pereira, Carvalho & Barbeiro, 2013), students' proficiency in writing and note-taking during classes is considered unsatisfactory. A similar study of students' perspective (Barbeiro, Pereira & Carvalho, 2015), with a sample of more than 500 students from different areas, identified problems of lack of clarity in reading and writing assignments and the demonstration of how they should be carried out, as well as the absence of a real feedback. According to the students, many teachers do no more than grading their written papers. This lack of support had already been identified in a study by Fischer and Dionísio (2010) who concluded that "students learn 'by doing' and by being corrected during the several tutorial sessions without any kind of metalinguistic knowledge" (p. 2). Students' lack of skills as well as limited support provided by teachers affect not only students' ability to express their knowledge in exams and essays but also the way they carry out other academic tasks that imply the use of writing.

Writing is involved in many different tasks in academic contexts. Among them, taking notes from lectures is a very frequent one. Carvalho, Silva & Pimenta (2007) analyzed notes taken by freshmen during oral expositions and found that students chose to transcribe, as faithfully as possible, the teacher's discourse. This attempt at verbatim transcription created difficulties in fully recording information and organizing the content as well as in integrating interpretation. Knowledge reproduction prevailed over knowledge transformation. This trend is confirmed in a quantitative survey study (Carvalho & Dourado, 2010) comprising 1700 participants, freshmen and final year students, who were asked about their note-taking processes in classes. Faithful transcription is more frequent than other procedures, such as synthesizing, drawing concept maps or listing key words. There are no significant differences between freshmen and final year students. Nevertheless, registering only what is written on the board or projected is more frequent among the first year students, while the final year students more often select relevant information and include personal comments.

Similar processes arise when we focus on how students take and organize their notes in reading tasks. The analysis of reading notes (Carvalho & Pimenta, 2007; Carvalho, Silva & Pimenta, 2007) revealed that students have difficulties in selecting and organizing relevant information and also

in paraphrasing. Notes are often a mere reproduction of selected parts of the texts students read.

Another analysis of the same survey (Carvalho & Dourado, 2010) showed that syntheses, summaries, graphic schemes, or concept maps were rarely reported as part of note-taking. When asked about exam-study practices students answered most frequently they reread notes previously taken in the classes, underlining the most important topics and taking some notes in the margins. Students' difficulties in knowledge reorganization and elaboration were detected by Carvalho and Pimenta (2007) when analyzing text plans students made before writing an essay. Those difficulties have mainly to do with the detection of logical and hierarchical links and relationships involving various elements or the synthesis of ideas and data retrieved from different sources.

The way students perform knowledge reception and knowledge elaboration activities has an expected correspondence at the knowledge expression level. Cabral (2005) analyzed university students' perspectives on writing, identifying some characteristics of underdeveloped writing, such as the predominance of subjectivity, the lack of attention to the context and the reader, and the superficial revision of texts. In a survey focused on students' writing practices in tests and exams (Carvalho, 2008, 2013), some features of immature writing, such as transcribing without pauses or including as much information as possible, emerged from the student's answers. And the analysis of literature review texts (Carvalho & Pimenta, 2007) showed that students have problems in structuring information and configuring it in the appropriate genre and register, as well as in conveying in their own words information gathered in the texts previously read, which can be seen as a cause of plagiarism. Referencing and quoting the source text according to the conventions of academic writing is also a problem for many students.

These features are not unique to undergraduate students, as they can also be found in postgraduate (MA) students, as demonstrated by Carvalho (2012, p. 22). Both the analysis of students' written products (reading notes, text plans and literature review/synthesis) and their answers to a questionnaire show that:

[...] many students had difficulties in performing the tasks they were assigned. These difficulties concern three main aspects: reading and selecting relevant content; organizing and synthesizing information retrieved from different textual sources; making use of conventional

forms adopted by the academic community, following a reference style either when introducing quotations and references in the text or when organizing the bibliographic list. (Carvalho, 2012, p. 22)

Students' difficulties regarding academic literacy are not exclusive of the Portuguese context. Research developed in other countries in different parts of the world has identified similar problems. As a tiny sample of the extensive body of literature on this issue, we can refer the works of Castelló and Monereo (1999); ICAS (2002); Boch and Piolat (2005); Boscolo, Arfé and Quarisa (2007); Donahue (2009); Russell, Parker, Street and Donahue (2009); Delcambre and Lahanier-Reuter (2010); Carrasco and Gonzalez (2011); and Vega, Bañales and Reyna (2013).

### **About the causes of students' difficulties in the use of academic language**

Identifying what lies behind the way students read and write in Higher Education can help us develop ways to assist students overcome their difficulties. Some larger socio-cultural transitions have been identified in the literature, namely the massification of Higher Education bringing different populations into the university and changes in technology and communication practices that have affected students experience of written language. We will discuss these briefly, but to the extent that, being true, they only add to the responsibility of schooling. Therefore, we will focus our attention on a series of studies, synthesized below, that shed light on the literacy practices Portuguese students experience through their whole schooling path. These studies make evident the reasons why students are not prepared when they face the complexity of Higher Education language uses. These causes are not the fault of individual teachers or students, but rather the consequences of systemic practices within the school system. These systematic practices suggest specific gaps in students' literacy development and in the uses of language, as they promote the reproduction of declarative knowledge instead of enhancing knowledge construction and meaningful learning.

## *Causes related to social, cultural, economic and scientific contexts*

### **School massification and the gap between language used in and outside school**

Students' problems in the use of academic language are often associated with school massification (Russell *et al.*, 2009), a process that started in most developed countries after World War II, with the increasing influx into the university of people belonging to social groups who previously did not go much further than the first stages of school attendance. In Portugal, school massification began in the late 60's and was intensified after the revolution of April 1974, which put an end to 50 years of dictatorship. It was associated with migratory movements from the rural zones in the interior of the country to the more industrialized areas around the main cities near the Atlantic coast. In Portuguese Higher Education, massification occurred mainly in the 1980s and 1990s.

Before that massification process, Higher Education was attended mainly by students of higher social classes who were familiar with elaborated and written uses of language, which do not differ much from the languages used at school to encode and communicate knowledge. Their mastery of such elaborated codes differs from language skills of students from lower social groups, who, in their daily lives, are mainly acquainted with less complex and oral uses of language. These students face a double difficulty when they enter school: learning how to read and write and dealing with more elaborated codes (Morais & Neves, 2007). According to Bernstein (2000), there are *restricted* codes, dependent on the context of use and directly related to a specific material reality, and *elaborated* codes, more independent of the context and indirectly related to a specific material basis. He also distinguishes Bernstein (1999) horizontal discourses from vertical discourses. The former "entails a set of strategies which are local, segmentally organized, context specific and dependent, for maximizing encounters with persons and habitats." Meanwhile, the latter "takes the form of coherent, explicit, and systematically principled structured, hierarchically organized [...] or the form of a series of specialized languages with specialized modes of interrogation and specialized criteria for the production and circulation of texts [...]" (Bernstein, 1999, p. 159).

Students' problems in the use of school language are also analyzed by Gee (2004), who refers to the existence of different varieties of language,



used in different contexts of activity with different aims. He distinguishes *vernacular* varieties of language, acquired by people, since early childhood, in contact with those around them in the different contexts where they are inserted, from *specialized* language varieties like those used at school. When accessing school, children from higher social strata have already developed some mastery of those specialized varieties, once they are used in their familiar contexts, while children from lower groups have not. Throughout the schooling process, the difference between the two groups tends to increase instead of decreasing. While the former live in a context that enhances the development of language skills involved in the use of specialized school codes, the latter can hardly find at school the necessary means to develop and improve their language skills and have therefore difficulties in using the elaborated varieties prevailing in that context.

Thus, attending school does not necessarily provide the mastery of elaborated, vertical codes to those students from lower social groups, who are used to restricted codes and bring their horizontal discourses into school. Many of those students still have that handicap when they access Higher Education. This phenomenon has been occurring along the past decades, first in developed countries like the USA or the UK, then in other countries as their development enabled the access to Higher Education to groups that previously were excluded from its attendance (Russell *et al.*, 2009).

### **New technologies, new communication processes, new modes in knowledge configuration**

Recent technological developments have enabled new forms of communication, having deep effects on the way people relate with each other and their use of language and other semiotic resources. This phenomenon may also influence the way knowledge is processed and structured at a cognitive level. We may then wonder, for example, whether knowledge accessed through images would have an essentially iconic structure, as opposed to knowledge accessed through words, especially through written texts, implying a greater degree of explicitness and a distance from the categories of our experience (Halliday, 1989). Some authors have associated writing with more elaborated ways of thinking, as it involves discursive patterns that facilitate the organization of the ideas and the expression of their relationships, enabling the full expression of definitions, assumptions and premises and the explanation of formal logic rules. Written language might therefore be a powerful

instrument in the construction of abstract and coherent theories that explain reality (Applebee, 1984; Olson, 1977).

School has also been incorporating new multimodal media in classrooms, providing new and often more effective conditions for learning. However, when students are requested to express the knowledge they have acquired, they do it by writing, once evaluation at school remains dependent on the use of written words. As we go further in schooling, and especially in Higher Education, monomodal written texts progressively become the main and almost exclusive source of information. This may also cause difficulties to students who were used to different practices in the previous school levels.

*Causes that stem from the Portuguese context and the literacy practices Portuguese students are involved in through their whole schooling path*

**The novelty of Higher Education literacy practices**

Students' difficulties in Higher Education arise when they face the necessity of reading and producing novel text genres, with greater complexity, specificity and disciplinary particularity than in previous schooling. Facing a more demanding context of language use without any preparation with such genres, students tend to reproduce the practices that they had been used to use in previous levels, which are more conducive to knowledge reproduction than to knowledge transformation. In fact, several studies carried out in Portugal along during the ten past years have shown that, before accessing Higher Education, students are almost entirely engaged in knowledge reproduction practices, and are rarely requested to perform knowledge transforming or problem solving tasks or use writing as a learning tool. Such knowledge reproduction practices take place in most of the curricular disciplines, regardless of their scientific domain.

Due to the strong impact of textbooks on the definition of teaching and learning practices, their analysis may be considered a reliable source of information about what takes place in the classroom and an evidence of the main conceptions that underlie pedagogical practices (Choppin, 1992; Castro, 1995). Analyzing History, Geography, Natural Sciences and Physics & Chemistry textbooks in use in Portuguese Upper Elementary School (Grades 7, 8, and 9), Carvalho, Pimenta, Ramos and Ríos (2006) concluded that writing is more often used in knowledge reproduction tasks than in those concerning knowledge construction. In fact, more than 80%

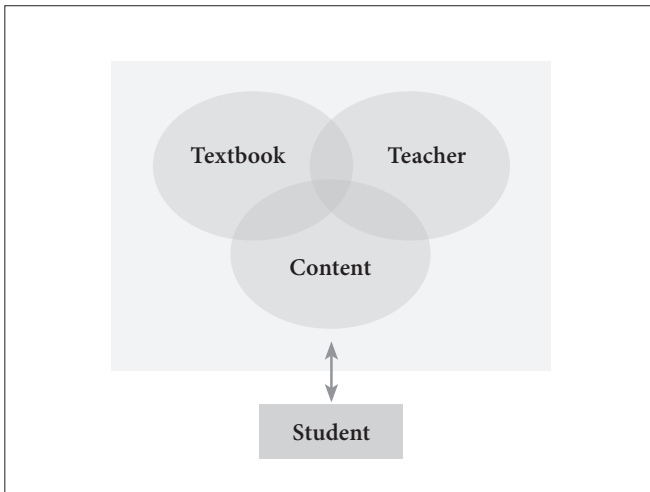
of the tasks involving writing in the textbooks, regardless of the discipline, were classified as knowledge reproduction tasks. Similarly, the analysis of Grade 3 History and Science textbooks (Carvalho, Barbeiro & Pimenta, 2008; Carvalho & Barbeiro, 2013) demonstrated that writing in learning tasks does not go beyond students filling in information they can retrieve from the adjacent paragraphs.

In textbooks used in Portuguese schools, content organization and structure does not differ much from the structure students are expected to adopt whenever they are requested, in tests or exams, to express what they have learnt. “Cookbooky” instructions, that is, sets of instructions to be followed sequentially and linearly (Thornton, 2014), can often be found in textbooks, regardless their disciplinary domain, and the analysis of the way they imply language in learning activities reveals that writing is mainly used to reproduce information previously displayed.

In Portugal Carvalho, Silva and Pimenta (2008) asked more than 60 Upper Elementary School teachers about how reading and writing were used to enhance their students’ learning in different disciplines. Knowledge reproduction tasks predominated, such as copying information written on the board or projected on a screen, and space filling exercises. More complex tasks that imply higher cognitive activity in order to transform or elaborate knowledge, for example, note taking, summarizing, synthesizing information retrieved from different sources, drawing concept maps or writing reports, are much rarer and concern mostly laboratory activities. Another inquiry, involving a larger sample and focusing on reading and writing (Dionísio Viseu & Melo, 2011; Carvalho, Dionísio, Martinho, Silva & Viseu, 2012), led to the following conclusions: i) reading and writing practices reported in different content areas do not favour students’ engagement, a determinant factor of meaningful learning; ii) the most frequent reading and writing activities, as well as their functions and the textual resources involved, show that texts are mainly used in tasks of knowledge expression and application; iii) students play mainly the role of consumers, rather than constructors and producers of their own learning; iv) reading and writing do not appear as a means of approaching new content or regulating the learning processes.

From all these studies we can see that in Portugal at elementary and secondary levels, students write mostly to reproduce knowledge. This happens mainly in evaluation settings, in which success is rather dependent on the fidelity of such reproduction. Figure 1 represents the process of knowledge organization, transmission and expression that prevails in these levels.

Recognizing the importance and the regulatory role of textbooks, teachers use them as a source to define, structure and organize the contents to be taught in their lessons. Teachers and textbooks are therefore the two main, and mostly coincident, knowledge sources. The students are not considered knowledge producers but just recipients, the last stage of a knowledge transmission process, being requested to express, in tests or exams, what they have been taught (Barbeiro, 2003).

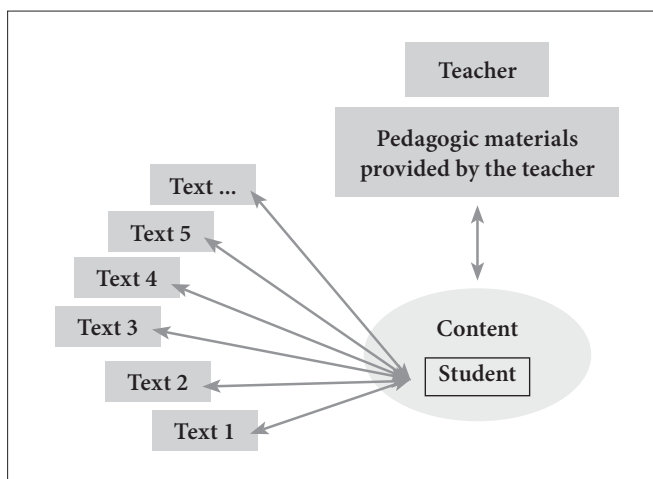


**Figure 1. Knowledge organization in Portuguese elementary and secondary schools**

Source: author's own work

When accessing Higher Education, students, who have so far been mainly involved in knowledge reproduction practices, face a new reality that demands an active attitude towards knowledge construction, requiring dealing with varied information sources and multiple perspectives on the same object, to which students are often expected to access through their own bibliographic search in libraries or digital databases. Higher Education implies new and more complex uses of language that demand distancing and decentering, the use of writing as a thinking tool, as an instrument of knowledge construction and not in a predominantly functional and expressive way students were used to in lower school levels (Klemp, 2004; Deschepper & Thyron, 2008).

This more complex process is represented in Figure 2:



**Figure 2. Knowledge organization in Higher Education**

Source: author's own work

In this case, students are expected to appropriate and reconfigure knowledge in their own way, as the result of a process in which they interact with multiple and often divergent sources of information shaped in diverse genres. The complexity of this process is highlighted by Klein and Boscolo (2016, p. 327) who consider that “the product of discourse synthesis is a unique integration, which may go beyond the information given in the sources.” It may involve a set of reading and writing practices, such as notetaking, summarizing, synthesizing, drawing concept maps and writing essays or any other kind of paper for evaluation and knowledge dissemination. Besides this, it is important to note that this knowledge expression is expected to occur within specific frameworks, which are defined by the academic community in which students are integrated and implies the domain of specific norms and conventions adopted by that community to refer to the respective study objects (Carvalho, 2013).

### **Reading and writing practices in language disciplines at elementary and secondary levels**

Students' problems concerning reading and writing in Higher Education contexts might also be related with previous reading and writing practices in language disciplines, especially in L1 classes (or L2 classes whenever L1 is not the language used at school). Taking into account the Portuguese reality, we

may say that, at Elementary and Secondary levels, such practices are rarely focused on the comprehension and production processes that are most relevant to learn in reading and writing.

In language classes, reading is mainly focused on poetry and narrative literary texts, devaluing other text genres implied in academic and professional contexts. Meaning construction is highly oriented and controlled and, more than questioning or discussing individual interpretations, teachers favor the definition of “the right answer” everyone should accept (Dionísio, 1993, 2000). Certain practices, such as extensive reading or methodical reading, are not frequent (Rodrigues, 2000). Decoding activities are predominant and plural readings with the active participation of students in the construction of meanings are not encouraged (Vieira, 2005).

As far as writing is concerned, practices often tend to perpetuate less advanced skills, instead of enhancing more advanced and complex competences. Based on Flower’s (1979), and Bereiter and Scardamalia’s (1987) theories, we may say that writer-based writing, knowledge telling practices still prevail over reader-based writing, knowledge transforming activities. Expressing feelings, describing personal experiences or stating opinions are still very common writing topics instead of the production of other text genres that imply a deeper attention to the context of production and its implications in terms of the text that is being produced (Carvalho, 1999, 2003). Things do not seem to have changed much, despite some modifications in the curriculum. Actually, more recent research (Gomes, Leal & Serpa, 2016), based on the analysis of all 5th grade Portuguese Language textbooks in use at schools, identified several configurative traits of a traditional conception of writing, such as: a predominance of practices that aim at the expression of personal experiences, sensitivity and the imaginary; the insistence on the production of narrative texts; the perception of writing as a predominantly individual activity; the non-consideration of the diversity of discursive intentions; the existence of a certain artificiality of writing practices, rarely equated in an effective communicative logic that presupposes the dimension of the social circulation of texts.

We may then conclude that language disciplines don’t often promote important literacy skills that students will need in order to participate in different social contexts of their actual and future lives, including the academic context. In fact, there seems to be a gap between the uses of language taught in language classes and the literacy practices involved in learning school contents.

## Conclusion

In order to overcome students' problems and prepare them for the use of texts involved in academic activity, varied approaches, implying different conceptions of literacy, have been developed along these years (Dionísio & Fischer, 2010). In these approaches, opposing conceptions of literacy emerge: on one hand, literacy as a set of generic skills that may be put into practice whenever they are necessary, independently from the context where language uses take place. On the other hand, a context dependent vision of literacy that implies specific uses of language framed in appropriate text genres (Lea & Street, 1998; Russell *et al.*, 2009; Carlino, 2013). Henderson and Hirst (2007) analyzed the web pages of several universities all over the world and concluded that, in spite of the attempts to affirm academic literacies as situated practices and social constructions, a conception of literacy as a set of generic skills may still be predominant in Higher Education. In fact, in the majority of the institutions, literacy is enhanced in writing centers that promote the acquisition of generic language skills and provide a set of guidelines that students are advised to follow step by step in order to cope with the demands of their academic activity.

In Portugal, the teaching of academic writing has no tradition in Higher Education, despite the recognition of students' difficulties. Nevertheless, we can refer some to work in this area, carried out in some Universities and Polytechnic Institutes: a few undergraduate courses, mainly in the area of Language, Humanities and Arts, have a discipline focused on Expression Techniques that may include some academic writing issues; in some institutions, there are introductory short courses for 1st year students; some post-graduation programs, especially at Ph.D. level, have courses or modules focused on writing aspects that are characteristic of the respective scientific field; there are also universities where, at the suggestion of some professors, semester optional courses are being offered to undergraduate and postgraduate students. And although a general and remedial perspective of academic literacy is still predominant, some of these initiatives assume a situated vision of academic literacy that, rather than teaching students the application of writing techniques, aims at promoting the appropriation of academic genres through meaningful practices in real contexts of language use.

What we have just mentioned indicates a growing interest in the issue of academic literacy in Portugal. However, we cannot help considering that

these are odd cases and much has still to be done towards the recognition of academic literacy as a relevant scientific field in Portuguese Higher Education.

Besides this, we consider that any effective approach to academic writing should not be confined to Higher Education but, as demonstrated in this text, should cover the whole schooling process with implications at the level of teaching and learning activities through deep changes in the way language is involved in such processes. These changes should address the work developed both in language classes and in the classes of other disciplines. In the former, by developing reading and writing practices that enable students to participate actively and meaningfully in different literacy practices in the school context and beyond. In the latter, through a greater involvement of reading and writing in learning processes, taking into account the specificity of the language and text genres used in each content area.

It should also take into account other aspects that are beyond school context, especially those related to language uses students perform daily outside school, including their vernacular discourses, which are often different and distant from those discourses valued within academia, whose domain is required for an effective and successful participation in academic activities. This presupposes the awareness of a new and complex reality, in the social, cultural, scientific and technological dimensions, which contemplates new publics attending higher education, new languages and new ways of configuring and expressing knowledge.

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